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BACCALAUREATE.

BY

ANDREW WYLLIE, D. D.

PRESIDENT OF THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY,

ADDRESSED TO THE SENIOR CLASS,

AT THE LATE COMMENCEMENT,

SEPTEMBER, 1846.

BLOOMINGTON:

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HOMER WHEELER, - - - - -	BRISTOL, do.

BACCALAUREATE.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN,

The subject to which your attention is invited is, Common Sense in relation to affairs of State.

There is nothing in the world so truly admirable as a good moral character, such a state of mind as constantly determines a man to do nothing but what is right.

Such a character may be considered as composed of three things; a clear understanding, so as to discern what right is; a power of conscience strongly to approve it; and integrity of heart, to put into practice what conscience approves.

It is in the last of these particulars that men principally fail in their duty. Men actually do what is wrong, or neglect to do what is right, not so much because they do not know what is right, or because they do not approve it, and prefer it to the contrary; but because they are wanting in integrity. They see and approve the right, but follow the wrong; because the dictates of reason and conscience are in them counteracted and overcome by inclination. Their heart is not in their duty. Something in the shape of pleasure, or gain, or power, engrosses their care, and leads them off, in the pursuit of it, from the path of rectitude.

Still, it is a matter of no small moment what kind of notions a person entertains respecting right and wrong; since, if incorrect, they will leave him without restraint on that side of his character where restraint is most needed; and as water confined will break through in whatever place the barrier which confines it is the weakest; so the impulses which drive men into wrong doing will force a way for themselves, through those parts of their character which are rendered infirm by some lurking error in the judgment.

In the case of such as are governed by reason and conscience, the only thing requisite to right action is right judgment. But the misfortune is that the majority are not in this case. They do not follow the guidance of reason and conscience. These are oracles which they do not consult: for they do not investigate, reflect and consider.—

Not a few are strangers to a sense of moral obligation. At the best, their sense of moral obligation is too weak to exert a controlling influence over their conduct. The auspices which guide them are taken from the impressions of the present hour. I say that the majority are in this state. Count, and you shall see. First the children. To these add such as remain children all their days,—not in malice, it may be, but in knowledge. And to these add such as are children in innocence as well as in knowledge,—though in the present state of things this is a case more rare than formerly. The reason ought to be considered. It is briefly this: the improved state of the world, as it respects physical science and the arts which spring out of physical science, has multiplied the temptations to evil practices to such a degree as renders it exceedingly difficult, scarcely possible, indeed, for one to grow up to maturity retaining the innocence of childhood, unless he goes on from innocence to virtue. He is innocent who intends no harm. But a child, and much more a man, may do a vast deal of harm without intending it. A little child playing with squibs in a magazine filled with gunpowder, may very innocently blow it up, and destroy many valuable lives together with its own. But a child is not allowed to play in a magazine among gunpowder.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN: it is a sad case. But it has actually happened, not once, but often.

I regard every man whose mind is ignorant and undisciplined, as best a child; and, if he have power in his hand, his case is that of a child playing with squibs among tons of gunpowder.

The gunpowder may be well secured in barrels closely jointed, so that straggling grains may not escape to form a train. If so, let the child take its pastime in the magazine;—let the simpleton be in power. He will be gratified, and no great harm done to any body. But if not so;—if the kegs of powder be not closely jointed and strongly hooped, and the floor be strewed with powder, it would be madness to let the child sport in the magazine;—or the simpleton have power to rule, in the analogous case. In the remote ages of the world, when despots ruled over the nations, such was their condition. In the language of Scripture, “children ruled over them.” We figure to ourselves the despots of antiquity as monsters of cruelty and wickedness. So, indeed, history has painted them. It is a mistake. They were not demons. They were only fools, who ruled over their subjects on the same principle as that according to which the good humored Mon-

aigne rode his horse. "I ride my horse," said he, "not because I have a right to ride him. I do not know that. He may have a right to ride me for aught I know. But I ride him because he allows it."

The despots of antiquity ruled over their people because their people allowed it; and, so far from being the monsters of cruelty which we are apt to imagine, they were, many of them, very benevolent after their fashion: that is, they were a well-meaning, innocent sort of folks, who, though they did a huge amount of mischief, meant none.

Well-meaning folly, armed with power, is often more to be deprecated than knavery itself. The spirit of religious persecution, which in past ages perpetrated such barbarities as shock our belief, was the offspring of a most ardent zeal for the good of mankind. So earnest was it in the good work of extirpating heresy, that it stopped at no means of accomplishing it. And why? Because heresy was a damning sin and greater than all temporal calamities, as being, in its consequences, eternally ruinous to the soul. To banish it from the earth was therefore a good work.

In no one portion of that high philosophy, which has for its object the improvement of the human race, have the nations of the civilized world made greater advances than in that part of it which relates to civil government, by introducing a policy which puts it out of the power of benevolent folly to do so much mischief as it formerly did. How it effects this end in the free governments of Europe is manifest. There is powder in the magazine; but it is well secured and guarded: there is power in the hands of Government; but it is kept in by checks on every side and by the terrible punishment to which its abuse is liable,—a punishment, which, in certain memorable instances, has been inflicted without mercy.

With us, though the policy is the same, the means are different. In our magazine there is no great store of powder. In the nation there is; but it is distributed in the cartridge boxes of the citizens themselves. To speak without a figure: no more power than is absolutely necessary is lodged with the General Government, and that portion, small as it is, has been passing from it to the several States.

Whether power be gathering to the State Governments, or passing from them to the people, or whether the state of things is in this respect at rest, are points which need not now be discussed.

What I have here to remark, though it may look like a paradox, is

a truth which especially in times of convulsion, I take great comfort in believing. It is this, that, so long as the spirit of our free institutions is preserved inviolate, there is little danger of the nation acting foolishly, even if we should suppose the majority of individuals composing it to be of the character just now presented in a rude and general outline; that is to say, innocent and well-meaning, but neither virtuous nor wise.

Granted let it be that the majority are, comparatively, unwise, how is it possible that a nation in which the majority rule, should act otherwise than unwisely?

In considering this problem, we shall see traces of a wisdom superior to the wisdom of man,—a wisdom which, in a wonderful manner, accomplishes its ends by means the most unpromising, bringing good out of evil, light out of darkness, order out of confusion, and causing the selfish and wrathful passions of men to praise the power by which they are controlled.

It is a fact, too well understood to need proof or illustration here that whatever men do hastily under the influence of passion or prejudice has little chance of being wisely done. Passion transforms wise men into fools, and what they do under its influence they regret afterwards, so soon as they come to themselves. Now, it is so ordered that a nation cannot act—this nation certainly cannot act—hastily.—Measures before being put into execution, must go through a certain process prescribed in the Constitution, in undergoing which process they are sifted and examined on all sides and in all their bearings.—And this is one reason why people acting in and through their organization as a nation, may always be expected to act more wisely than without it. Without it they are a mob: and the difference in action between a mob and an organized body, the individuals being, in both cases the same, is that, in the first case, the most violent, and in the second, the most prudent, will naturally take the lead. And one reason for this is, that which has been already mentioned, that, in the case of organization, time is necessarily taken to think before acting.

Another and more powerful reason is, that what is done by a nation acting in and according to its organization, is usually the result of the mind and will, not of the majority of the whole number of individuals of which the nation is composed, but of a majority of such as are deemed to be the wisest and best. This is especially true in a representative government. The people, as a mass, may not be capable

of originating wise measures of government; yet they may be wise enough to choose such as are capable: just as, though a man may not have enough of architectural skill to construct a bridge, he may have common sense enough to employ a capable workman. All he has to look after is the reputation of such as seek to do the work: and, as this is a matter of fact, he needs no great amount of knowledge to enable him to decide whom he should employ.

The right of instructing their representatives, where it is claimed by the people, seems, in theory, to be predicated on the assumption that they are wiser than their representatives: it looks as if the people of a district were to employ an architect to construct a bridge for their accommodation, and then give him directions how the work was to be done. But the absurdity is only in theory: for in practice the representatives of the people are never instructed except in rare and important cases; and then, not by the people themselves, but by a select number, to whom they think proper to commit this part of the business.

Other reasons might be given in explication of the problem. How it is that a people, a majority of whom, though innocent and well-meaning, are neither virtuous nor wise, may be expected nevertheless, to act, upon the whole, wisely in their organized capacity as a nation. I shall content myself with adding but one more to those already mentioned; and it is this, that, in virtue of a national organization, such individuals as are called by the voice of the people to the management of their affairs, are, by the very fact of their elevation to power, put in possession of many advantages for acting wisely, as well as urged by many and powerful motives to make the best use of these advantages. The salaries they receive relieve them from the care of providing for themselves; and thus give them leisure to care for the public good. They have the best opportunities of knowing what is the state of things in the world at present, both at home and abroad, as well as of profiting by the lessons of experience which have been handed down from the past. The honor which their country has conferred upon them must, if they have any generous feelings, touch their hearts and bind them to its interests. The eyes of the world are upon them. The impartial judgment of posterity will be pronounced upon their conduct. A rival party,—for in free Governments there must be rival parties,—a rival party stands ready to mark out and magnify every error they may contain. With such an anta-

ges for acting wisely, and such inducements to improve them, he must be either invincibly stupid, or incorrigibly perverse, who does not, with the office, become, as it were, inspired with the spirit of the office, and, thereby, better qualified to judge and to act for the public good, almost as a matter of course, in consequence of being called to take a part in directing the affairs of a great nation.

Native good sense, confirmed by habits of right action in the ordinary walks of life, will always be required by the people, as a prerequisite qualification in the character of those to whom they choose to intrust the management of their most important concerns; except in those times when party spirit rages to such a degree as to render them blind to their interests. Subject to the same exception, it may be confidently expected, that where other and higher qualifications, beside the one just mentioned, are required to fit a man for office, the people will demand in the candidate the reputation of possessing them. I say, not the qualifications themselves, but the reputation of possessing them. I would not flatter the people; therefore I say, that except as to the one first mentioned, they are not capable of knowing who possess the requisite qualifications: neither indeed is any one, except on an intimate acquaintance, which, in the nature of things, is limited to few. I would on the other hand, do justice to the people; therefore I say that they are capable of knowing who have the reputation of possessing qualifications. Reputation is a matter of fact, and of matters of fact the people are competent judges. Common sense is sufficient for this: and whoever will not allow to the people common sense has less than none himself.

The common sense of the people, then, will generally elect to office such as they think have a reputation for the requisite qualifications.

Consider, now, what further effect this must have upon the community. There is a law of Political Economy which you well understand, a law by which Demand acts upon Production. Talent itself is obedient to this law. It will come into existence where there is a demand for it. A nation, such as this has already become, if it should appoint, in the various departments of its service, persons who are in repute for talents such as the public service requires, will create a demand for such talents; and such talents will be extensively and assiduously cultivated, and in consequence produced in such abundance that the supply will overrun the demand. Competition

will then take place among those who have the product, and the public may choose the best. The residue will not be lost, either to the owner or to the public, but will find employment elsewhere which will be alike profitable to both.

In this way a stimulus is applied to industry in cultivating the intellectual, and, to some extent, the moral faculties of our nature, which can hardly fail to have a good effect upon the nation at large. Our experience, though it has had, as yet, the space of but two generations through which to run, has put the truth of this remark, so far as it respects the intellectual faculties, beyond dispute. There is no nation in the world, of which the people are not far surpassed by ours in knowledge generally, and especially in all kinds of knowledge relating to government. The truth of the other part of the remark, that which relates to the culture of the moral faculties, may seem somewhat doubtful. Grievous complaints are sometimes made against the people, for what is alledged to be their indifference to the moral character of those whom they raise into power by their suffrages. If there is, in any instance, ground for such complaints, candor seems to require that it be set to the account of that inherent imperfection which belongs to all human affairs. And in many cases complaint, without sufficient reason, is made against men in power. Envy is always busy in detracting from the merits of men in elevated stations, and in endeavoring by misrepresentation to fix upon them unmerited censure. The pages of the grave historian have not escaped its influence. "It belongs to kings when they do well to be evil spoken of," is a saying of one of the sages of antiquity, which contains a truth that few men who have acted much in public affairs are not able to appreciate. Our rulers were all bad men, if we will believe what was said of them by their political opponents. Washington himself, though he well deserved the high encomium, "First in war; first in peace; and first in the hearts of his countrymen," was, in his time, traduced and vilified more than any of his successors.—On the other hand, it is usual with such as aim at their own aggrandizement to cover over their proceedings with the most plausible pretences of zeal for the public good and devotion to the interests of the people. Besides, it is a fact, developed in an age not so remote that the influence of it should have entirely gone from the minds of men, that an example of the very worst sort of government was set by men who were Precisians in morals,—men who, whether with honest

intentions or otherwise it matters not,—attempted with all their zeal to make of civil government itself an instrument for perfecting the moral nature of their subjects and preparing them thus for the felicity of heaven. The people of these United States may not even know this fact, yet its influence has reached their inmost thoughts.—It has come down upon them through the stream of time, like other traditional influences of whose nature and origin they are ignorant: yet do these influences actuate them and determine their modes of thinking and acting. They constitute a part of their common sense, which, if not an infallible, is, nevertheless, upon the whole, a very safe and useful guide.

The only questions which the people should ask, said Mr. Jefferson, respecting a candidate, are these two: Is he honest? Is he capable? The people do ask these questions. They do not expect either; that one, who in his general character is dishonest, will be honest and trustworthy in a public station. They may be deceived in this matter, but the case is rarely to be found, in which they have called into their service such, whose reputation for integrity did not stand fair.—In fact, as the characters of our public men do actually undergo a severer scrutiny than with other nations; so, it is gratifying to reflect that, they have been generally such, to say the least, as to bear it as well.

There is another view of this subject which demands a remark. Common sense gives a feeling of common interest in that social organization, which connects us together with others in the same body. We feel that we are identified in the body. Its prosperity and adversity, its glory and its disgrace, its strength and its weakness, are our own. When it is exalted, we are proud: we are humbled in its degradation. This is patriotism. It is by no means rare among men.—The common sailor, no less than his admiral, feels its inspiration, and burns with a noble enthusiasm for the honor of his national flag. The common soldier feels the same. So do the peaceful cultivators of the soil, and the man of trade, and the artisan, and even the day laborer, who has no other interest in his country than the rights which he derives from his citizenship alone. Nor learning, nor wisdom, nor wealth, nor even virtue, in the proper sense of that term, is necessary to this benevolent passion. Nothing is necessary to it but common sense, in which, as has been already intimated, innocence is included. A love of mischief is the sure mark of a dunce. Work-

ers of mischief have not common sense. They may be among the people; but they are not of the people. They have no interests in common with the people; and for the reason that they have no sense in common with the people. They feel nothing of pain, while they inflict pain; nor remorse, when they do wrong to another. These wretches may cling to a nation, like vermin to a diseased body, but they are no part of it. When I speak of the people, I exclude those, as aliens from humanity.

Let, then, a person possess but common sense and no other distinction whatever, except that which bare citizenship confers, and he will have a concern in whatever affects the well-being of the nation of which he is a citizen; and that not only as it respects the present, but for the future. Fremont, in his Journal, gives some account of a tribe of Indians a little west of the Rocky Mountains, who seem to have no more foresight than wild-beasts. Nature has provided for them, in abundance, fish and salt, and both of the best quality; on which they live sumptuously in the summer; but in the winter many of them perish for want of food. History abounds in instances of a like nature, sufficiently numerous to justify the conclusion that it is owing to man's union with man in national relations that he learns to extend his views and plans into the future, as well as to profit by the experience of the past, and thus rises into the dignity of a rational being. To this cause, chiefly, are to be attributed the advantages of civilization: and thus it is easily seen, how it is that the people, without any other guide than their own common sense, will feel deeply concerned for the perpetuation of their national existence, and consequently fearful of such innovations and convulsions as seem to bring it into danger. The common sense of the people is the true conservative power of the nation.

Having seen what common sense may be relied on to accomplish in relation to civil government, let us turn the subject, and consider wherein it is liable to fail. This is a very interesting enquiry, especially for the statesman. For, since Government has ultimately nothing to depend upon but the common sense of the people, it seems to follow, that whatever is not within the sphere of common sense is without the province of government; and whenever government meddles with what does not of right belong to it, mischief in consequence is sure to fall upon its subjects. By attempting too much, individuals more frequently bring ruin upon their affairs, than by doing

nothing at all. ² And with governments. hitherto, this, I believe, has almost always been the case.

To comprehend, in a general remark, all such things as government ought not to attempt would be very easy:—it would be only to say, that of all such things possible to be done they are either such as are wrong in themselves, and so not to be done at all, or such as, though they ought to be done, lie without the province of government, and for this reason ought not, by government, to be attempted. But, though very true, this is too general to be satisfactory. Whoever would undertake to say anything on a subject so vast and complicated, and embarrassed by so many prejudices, must descend somewhat into particulars, and thus point out the way in which the thoughtful mind may direct its inquiries. With this view, and with great diffidence, I shall suggest a few remarks.

Common sense fails in distinguishing right from wrong. It feels the difference between good and evil, and recoils from the idea of inflicting on others what is painful to itself; and the reverse. And, so far, it seems to recognize the golden rule. But it does not: for the drunkard gives freely of his bottle to his destitute fellow, according to the rule, as his common sense understands it; for this is the very thing which he would have his fellow to do to him in a change of circumstances. And, not long since, this was the common sense of the people, rich and poor, throughout the nation. Besides, justice in certain cases inflicts pain, which is an evil. But common sense cannot tell why. And hence, being guided by no moral principle, it is the wildest and most irregular of all things, crying, to-day, Hosannah; to-morrow, Crucify. We have seen it in one nation, in the extreme of cruelty, beheading a kind hearted king and his queen, and butchering other females of his family; for no other reason but because the two kings who preceded him had spent too much of the nation's money—in war, one of them, and the other in debauchery; and so the people were brought to the point of starvation; and in another nation,* we have seen it in the opposite extreme of mercy—maintaining, without mercy or candor, the doctrine that the robber and the murderer should neither be resisted nor punished, but reclaimed by being made the objects of special kindness. Cato of Utica slew himself. The common sense of his sect of philosophers decided that suicide was in certain cases right. Our common sense decides against

* On our

it. On Napoleon's retreat out of Syria, some of his soldiers were infected with the plague. To take them along was to endanger the whole. To leave them behind was to expose them to the cruelty of the exasperated Turk. He, therefore, directed his surgeon, Desgenettes, to give to each of them a mortal dose of opium. Desgenettes refused. Which was right? he? or Napoleon? Common sense cannot decide.

Again: Common sense fails in discrimination. Except where differences are palpable, it does not distinguish; and is therefore liable to mistake appearance for reality; what is relative for what is absolute; custom for right; presumptions for truths; antecedents for causes; what is casual for what is constant.

The heavens seem to revolve round the earth; and common sense decides that they in reality do so. If we had antipodes, it seems that they must walk, like flies along the ceiling, feet upwards. Which, according to common sense, proves that the earth is not spherical.

Articles have been, for sometime past, steadily advancing in price; and common sense, expecting that they will continue to advance, sets people, all who have money or credit, upon making purchases, with the view to sell again, when prices have risen still higher. Thus, when all sails are spread to catch the prosperous breeze, a sudden tempest strikes the vessel, and down it goes, credit and all, to the bottom. There was a relative change between articles and money: but it was in the money sinking in value, not in the articles rising.

When the practice of the mercantile world made the slave trade a custom, common sense pronounced it right; and when lately this nation extended its territory by peaceful annexation, the common sense of some was shocked. Had it been done by war and conquest, the thing had been according to the Law,—that is Custom,—of Nations, and, of course, right!

Success, in any great enterprize stamps it, in the view of common sense, with the impression of justice; the want of it, with infamy.—“*Sequitur Fortunam, ut semper, et odit damnatos.*” Common sense always thinks the world right side up for the time, and shows no quarter to such as are for turning it upside down: hence it is, for the most part, opposed to all innovations.

If a citizen has shown himself to be possessed of military talents, by gaining victories over the enemies of his country, it creates, in the view of common sense, a presumption that he is not deficient in the

talent requisite for civil government also; and this concurring with the gratitude of the people seldom fails to elevate men of this sort to the highest places of honor and authority.

The story is told, somewhere, of a harbor on the coast of England, into which the sand had drifted, so as to render it useless. Enquiry was made for the cause, and it was ascertained that the harbor had been navigable, till about the time when a certain church had been built in the neighborhood; whereupon it was resolved to demolish the church. The story may be a fiction, but it illustrates very well the error into which common sense is apt to fall. Certain measures have been adopted, and the country has prospered. And yet, the prosperity may not be in consequence of the measures, but in spite of them.

As to what was mentioned last, in the specification just now given of the cases in which common sense fails to discriminate, namely, that of the difference between the casual and the constant, let it be observed, that there is really nothing casual in itself; since what we ascribe to chance flows from some cause or concurrence of causes, as truly as any other effect whatever. But those things are casual to us, of which the causes are either unknown or cannot be subjected to calculation. If we knew the concurring causes of what we call accident, and could calculate upon them, it would be no accident to us. And if, in an experiment, any one of a number of concurring causes be left out, the result will not be the same.

In the infancy of our Government, the danger of our being drawn into the whirlpool of European politics was so deeply felt by our rulers and the people generally, that, in order to avoid it, the Chinese policy came, for a time, into favor, and, was, to a certain extent, carried into execution. The motives which dictated the policy were good, and the policy had been wise, but that it overlooked one thing in its calculations—the spirit of naval enterprise innate in the people of the Northern States. This spirit, which disdained to pay tribute to the Barbary Powers for the use of the Mediterranean, and which *enjoyed* the perils of the deep, with which it had familiarized itself in every form and in every sea, was not likely to submit to a system which allowed it no room for the exercise of its powers. Common sense did not see this, however, at the time; and such as were opposed to the policy were denounced as Federalists.

For the reason just mentioned, measures of policy, which were emi-

nently successful in other times and countries, might not prosper in the grand experiment which is in progress now, and here. It is a new thing under the sun—essentially new: and certainly, if it be foolish to attach a piece of new cloth to an old garment, it cannot be wise to attach an old piece of cloth to a new garment.

Again, I remark, that common sense, though not confined altogether to the present in its views, does not extend them far into the future. No man ever planted an acorn, prompted by common sense. Yet, planting acorns, literally, might be of great advantage to a nation. To do it, in a metaphorical sense, that is, to perform certain works, the consequences of which will not begin to appear, till after those who perform them are no more on earth, is the very thing which, more than any thing else, tends to make nations great and illustrious.

Once more, I remark, that common sense does not appreciate those things which produce effects, whether for good or for evil, by means that are not palpable. These things belong to another sphere, above the sphere of common sense, that of high science. A man, from his observatory, is gazing at something through a telescope;—and every now and then he makes a figure or two on a piece of paper. Now, if you tell a person of plain common sense that this man is doing what will profit the world much more than that which is done by the farmer, the artisan, or the merchant, and that it will be the means of saving many lives, and much property, from perishing by shipwreck, he will probably suspect you of an attempt to play upon his credulity.

There are other branches of high science, those I mean which are conversant with the operation of moral causes, with respect to which, for a similar reason, common sense is at fault. The truths contained in these branches of high science, when enunciated in words, are, in fact, in the apprehension of common sense, so many enigmas. They abound in all ancient writings. Take an instance or two, by way of specimen: “The half is greater than the whole.” “Be not righteous over much.” “Woe to thee that spoilest and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously and they dealt not treacherously with thee; when thou ceasest to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou ceasest to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.” “The meek shall inherit the earth.” “In Political Economy two and two do not always make four—frequently they make one.”

Time does not allow us to pursue the analysis of the subject any

further. Let us gather into one view the principal points that have presented themselves. We have seen

1. That civil government, (I mean that kind of it which is called free,) rests ultimately on the common sense of the people.
2. Common sense dwells among appearances and particulars, which it can, however, with a certain degree of accuracy, generalize. But
3. It does not, except in palpable cases, discriminate.
4. It never rises into the sphere of high science, whether in Physics or in Morals.

From these truths, demonstrable, as it appears that they are, from the nature and condition of man, certain consequences follow; to one only of which I shall call your attention, and then conclude. It is this, that, under a certain condition, implied in the foregoing remarks, and to be distinctly mentioned in its proper place, the people may be safely trusted to perform the part assigned to them in the Constitution.

Who are the people? and what is the part prescribed for them in the Constitution?

Who are the people? The term is used as embracing in it all persons, except such as are notoriously distinguished from the mass. This definition excludes, on the one side, as before was said, evil doers: for they are notorious for wickedness. It excludes, on the other side, such as are distinguished for their virtue, or talents and attainments in high science. These extremes being lopped off on either side, there are left under the denomination, The People, those, all those, and none but those, whose chief characteristic is common sense, in which is implied innocence, or a disposition averse to social injury.

What is the part which they have, by the constitution to perform? To choose their rulers. And is not common sense competent for this? Not inward character,—to penetrate which has not been given to man—it is the prerogative of God to search the heart—not character, but reputation, which is the appearance of character, its outward face, and which is a matter of fact, is what the people must look to, in choosing their rulers. And so do courts of justice, in matters affecting the lives of men. When the veracity of a witness is in doubt, the inquiry is, not into his veracity, a thing which in itself no mortal can know, but into his reputation for veracity, which, like other matters of fact, may be known. If, indeed, civil government were not confined, as ours happily is, to matters cognizable by common sense;—if, for instance, the end of civil government were, as once it was

thought to be, to promote true religion, it would be necessary for government to resort to means in the use of which common-sense would be continually baffled; to say nothing of the persecution under forms of law, and the civil wars, which would be the consequence.

Except, then, in cases of great emergency, among which may be reckoned the amendment of the constitution, the constitution has left for the people nothing to do but elect their rulers: and for this, common sense is sufficient. But in those other cases of emergency, it might seem that something more and better is needed. There is: and, whatever name we may please to give to the process by which it is formed, the thing itself is Public Opinion.

It is formed by the refractive power of the body politic acting upon thought, like the atmosphere upon the rays of light. The loftiest peaks, rising heavenward far above the clouds, first catch the living light; lower eminences next; and so on, till it is "deep day," when the lowest valley is illuminated. The young, and such as are sensible that they need information, naturally seek it from the elders of the people; from such as are in repute for wisdom; from such as have had great experience; from such as, having enjoyed great advantages for knowing, have also diligently improved them; and from such especially as are under no very strong temptation to misapprehend the truth of things, or misrepresent it to others. If any do not so, it must be either because they *care not*, or because they lack common sense; for common sense pays due deference to the opinions of others, especially such as are known to lead a serious, thoughtful and enquiring course of life. Even persons who occupy the highest grades of knowledge, disdain not to learn from those of the lowest, since the desire for truth increases as the knowledge of it increases, and the most ignorant may know something which may have escaped the observation of the wisest. The opinions of men have a certain roughness, till it is rubbed off, in being compared with those of other men; so that what may be true in the abstract is rarely fit for use, till it is modified and polished, by undergoing the action upon it of many minds. The most knowing are not all-knowing; and there are few subjects, which, in the short space of human life, can be examined on all sides, and viewed in all their bearings, by the same individual.—Wisdom in the government of a nation is nothing, after all, but the common sense of the nation improved and corrected into a sound public opinion and enlightened, by receiving into itself the purer

light of reason, as developed in the intercourse of hand with mind, in the long and varied course of human experience.

Enough has been said, I trust, to justify the position which it was the intention of these remarks to maintain and illustrate, namely: that the people may be safely trusted to perform the part assigned to them in the constitution. This position, you will remember, was taken under an implied condition, which was to be distinctly mentioned in its proper place. This is that place.

The condition is this, that the number of evil doers, a class which I am unwilling to include under the same name with the people, be not so numerous as to be able, whether by violence, or their votes, to take the control of the affairs of State. For, under this condition of things, protection to person or property, which is the proper end of civil government, cannot be enjoyed by the industrious and peaceable portion of the citizens. And, indeed, since government in all cases must derive its entire support from such citizens, they will not long endure,—it is not in the nature of man long to endure,—a state of things which gives the products of honest industry into the hands of a set of tyrannical and insolent oppressors, to be squandered by them in riot and licentious living.

And the tyranny of many is far less endurable than that of one: even as, were a person condemned to be devoured, he would rather suffer that kind of death by a single tiger, than by ten millions of fleas.

What then can be done to prevent the number of evil-doers, infesting the community, from progressively increasing to such a degree as, sooner or later, to overthrow, or corrupt that free government which we justly hold so dear? In answer to this question I can only say at present, that, whatever can be done for this purpose must be done chiefly by the citizens in their individual capacity, each one acting by himself in obedience to the dictates of his own mind and conscience. If every citizen were to do this, all would be virtuous. And this is more than any government can do. All that government here aims at, is to keep the citizens innocent, or, more properly speaking, innocuous: and it has been usually found that, whenever governments have attempted more than this, they have, in the same proportion, accomplished less. In their attempts to improve a portion of the earth into a Paradise, they have converted it into an Aeldama.

Whatever is pure on earth is private: what is common is, to some

extent, also unclear: and as government proceeds upon principles of common sense, it can go no further than common sense, that is people in common, will approve. For stopping at this point it is to be praised, so long as it leaves its subjects at liberty to go as much further, each for himself, as they please. You do not approve of slavery. It is well. But does the government compel you to keep a slave? Not at all. Why then do you complain? But slavery ought to be abolished. Abolish it then, as fast as you can—only in a peaceable way: for if you use violence, government will deal with you as an evil-doer. This is, at least, common sense.

YOUNG GENTLEMEN: from an attentive consideration of that part of the general subject to which your thoughts have been turned on the present occasion, it is not too much to expect that you may be able to draw some useful instruction, as to that course of conduct which, in future life, you ought to pursue as individuals: it will, however, more especially deserve your attention in its bearings upon your relations to the public, the people, your fellow citizens. Should it fail to suggest to you, on all occasions, what you ought to do, it may, at least, admonish you of some of the things which it will become you to avoid. I shall conclude by mentioning some few of these things, leaving it to your own reflections to find out the rest.

And, first, you will, in most of those cases which immediately affect the people, be cautious how you act upon the knowledge of facts unknown, or not well understood, by the people: for, till they know and understand the facts, they cannot be expected to approve the conduct predicated upon them. Owing to their neglect of this rule, it has often happened that honest-hearted persons have been put down, and their efforts defeated, by others, who, though actuated by no concern for the public good, have known how to manœuvre so as to gain an advantage over them analogous to that which, in naval tactics, is called the “Weather-gage.” Innocence, the innocence of a dove, to be safe, must be joined with the wisdom of the serpent.

In the second place; you will avoid, as much as possible, party associations, and the excesses of party spirit. Whoever attaches himself to a party makes himself, to some extent, a slave, and may expect the treatment of a slave, whenever he refuses to go all lengths with the party that he calls *his*, but that in reality owns *him* as *theirs*: but, besides this, he deprives himself of the advantage of that improvement, both in virtue and happiness, which is to be derived from

the free and enlarged intercourse of mind with mind. Were all the wisdom and all the goodness that there is among men to be collected into one party, it would be something new under the sun. Beware of the folly that expects, and the arrogance that claims, any such thing. Union with a party may advance to office: but my serious advice to you and all my young friends, is never to seek office. If it come, you need not, without reason, reject it; but, in no case, run after it.

In the third place, let this subject teach you the folly of supposing, and the still greater folly of acting as if you supposed, that the people possessed not common sense: for, though they may not be able "to divide a hair betwixt its south and south-west side," they know "the difference between a hawk and a hand-saw." As contemptible in the eyes of all men of sound learning as they are odious to all persons of common sense, are those empty and conceited pedants, who, because they may have a Diploma from some College or Literary Society to show, seem to think themselves raised to an elevation to which the common people may think themselves too happy in having the privilege to look up. Not that I would have you think the less of yourselves, on account of the advantages you may have derived from that course of study which you have just completed: they are advantages, however, which will operate, and ought to operate against you, if you consider them as possessions of which you are to be proud, and not as means of usefulness, to be laid out and employed in promoting the true interests of the people. You will do well to remember that you are still of the people, and that their interests are your interests. In truth, I reckon it among the advantages of that liberal course of study in which you have been engaged, that it is likely to preserve you from the error of thinking more highly of yourself than you ought to think. It is not the man of liberal education who is apt to exalt himself: for he has been accustomed to stand, as it were, in the presence of "the mighty dead;" and reverently to listen to those men who have been most eminent in all ages past, for natural talent, acquired knowledge and moral worth, and who, though dead, still speak in their immortal works. Thus they have acquired the habit of deferring to others, and of distrusting themselves whenever they are drawn, by a course of independent thinking, towards conclusions for which no support can be found in the common sense of mankind, or the authority of the wise and good of other times and countries. On the contrary, the most self-conceited are usually such,

whose opportunities have been as limited as their capacities. Persons of this sort make the most independent thinkers. Having passed their youth in seclusion from all the world, except such as are no better cultivated than themselves, if they should happen on any occasion, to have their brain fired by any exciting idea, they are in haste to gather up some scraps of learning, and to make trial of their gifts of oratory, that they may be the better able to impart it to the world. Pursuing their one idea out of its connections, they soon take their leave of the world of common sense, and get into a world of their own, a world built and furnished out of their own one idea. So prolific is it. It becomes to them sun, moon, and stars; earth, sea, and air; and the whole human race besides. They are rich in it: independent. Liberal, too, of their wealth, they are; ready to impart instruction, that is to say, their one idea, to others; but too independent to need any in return. Now, in all seriousness, I would say that their unwillingness to receive instruction in return, is their own loss, and affords no good reason why you should refuse to receive the benefit of their one idea. For I hold that, whoever contributes a single idea to the common stock of knowledge which is in circulation in any community, is, so far, a public benefactor, and ought to be treated as such; even though he should so magnify the importance of his one idea, as to refuse to act in concert with those who have that one, and one more.

You will bear it in mind, then, that, in the busy world into which you are about to enter, you will find many, your inferiors in literary and scientific attainments, from whom, nevertheless, you may learn much. While you have been studying books, they have been studying men and things: and though you may be better able than they to demonstrate what is best in the abstract, they may know more than you about what is practicable. What concerns you most, is, indeed, to be regulated by your own mind, acting under a sense of your responsibility, as individuals, to the Author of your being. Still, as He designed you for society, that you may act your part in it, it will become you to arrogate to yourselves no superiority over your fellow-citizens, as to those interests which are common to them with you, and blindly attaching yourselves to no political party, nor yet to the learned, as a party, distinct from the body of the people, commit yourselves to the guidance of common sense. Our government is most emphatically one of common sense. Its founders indeed were

illuminated by a knowledge, and guided by a wisdom, much superior to common sense; and for this very reason it was, that, in framing the constitution of a government for the people and to be put into the hands of the people, they constructed it on the principles of that faculty which judges according to sense, a faculty which the Author of nature has bestowed upon all men. By some among the wisest of the founders of our government, it was thought to be but an experiment. It may be so. Let it, however, have a free course and a fair chance. The time is propitious. The space it occupies gives room enough: and, though there are difficulties in its way, let us hope that, by the blessing of that Kind Providence which has guarded it hitherto upon prudent and persevering efforts for their removal, they will, at length, be removed, the resources of this vast country be developed by the industry and enterprise of an expanding population, increasing by a ratio beyond example, till the nation shall become, in the fullest sense of the terms, a nation of freemen, great, united and happy, the joy and praise of the whole earth.

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT
OF
THE INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY,
WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 30TH, 1846.

ORDER OF EXERCISES.

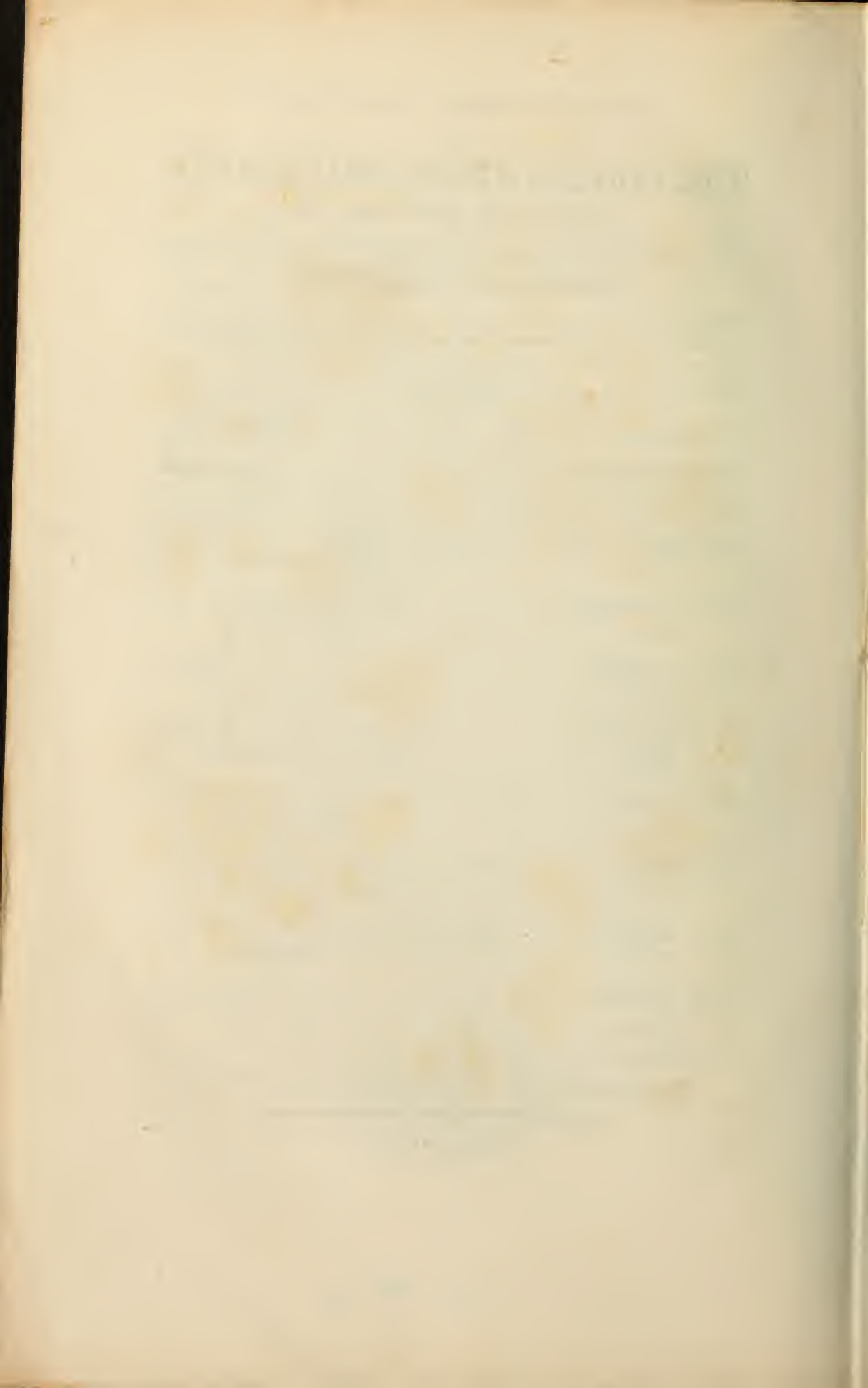
MUSIC by the Monroe Band—UNIVERSITY GRAND MARCH.

PRAYER.

MUSIC.	-	-	-	-	-	<i>The Chariot.</i>
T. B. GRAHAM,	-	-	-	-	-	SALUTATORY.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>College Hornpipe.</i>
J. CLARK,	-	-	-	-	-	UTILITY OF CONTROVERSY.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Highland Brigade.</i>
T. P. CONNELLY,	-	-	-	-	-	RANK AND DIGNITY OF MAN.
MUSIC.	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Boston Brigade.</i>
W. P. MARTIN,	-	-	-	-	-	STOICISM.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Handell's Quick Step.</i>
R. R. ROBERTS,	-	-	-	-	-	RANK GIVES FORCE TO EXAMPLE.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Kendall's Quick Step.</i>
W. M. SHARP,	-	-	-	-	-	UNIVERSAL PEACE—EFFECT OF CHRISTIANITY.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Hail Columbia.</i>
D. SHUCK,	-	-	-	-	-	EFFECT OF A BELIEF IN A FUTURE STATE.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Lafayette's Welcome.</i>
H. WHEELER,	-	-	-	-	-	MORAL INFLUENCE OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Grand Entry.</i>
S. N. MARTIN,	-	-	-	-	-	VALEDICTORY.
MUSIC,	-	-	-	-	-	<i>Titus' March.</i>

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